

Course Syllabus Digital Media Ethics 2021

University of Florida JOU

By **Angela Long, Course Instructor**

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Hello everyone

This is an explanation of the aims and course work in RTV 4930, Special Study in Telecommunication, which is Digital Media Ethics.

In a nutshell, this is about right and wrong in online behavior, and how to tell the difference.

The course examines digital life in the 21st century. Our aim is to have a toolkit of right, wrong, and what to do as mass communicators wishing to be trusted. We review how the internet has changed human interaction, and what is good and bad about this. The course involves case studies, discussion, and deliberation, as well as reading and listening to fundamentals of ethical thought. Current affairs and trends, and understanding them, play a big part. Moral philosophy is a basis for the exploration of issues, but also important are developed and developing cultural norms. We'll also consider how different standards can apply in different societies or communities.

The required text is *Media Ethics: Key Principles for Responsible Practice*, Third Edition. Most sessions will include readings and themes from this book, which is available online. (Check with the college bookshop.)

Throughout this unit, students will:

- Examine how people behave on the internet, and contrast this with traditional views of good ethical standards, or “doing the right thing”
- Consider problems in mass communications with vast audiences and lack of regulation on the internet
- Discuss and try to formulate appropriate action when an online ethical problem arises
- Consider the responsibilities of those who have access to vast amounts of information about individuals
- Make and justify decisions about ethical dilemmas

By the end of the semester, students will be expected to have:

- critical understanding of ethics and their application to journalism and other communications professions
- appreciation of differences between communication in the online and offline environments
- knowledge and analysis of regulation of journalism/PR/video industries
- awareness of current codes of behavior for media professionals, and how these fit in the online environment

There will be four assignments, and participation in two online discussions during the semester. The final assignment is worth 50% of the grade, and will be due Friday April 16 2021. See also the Grading Scheme doc (in Canvas).

PROGRAMME 2021 – SESSION by SESSION

- 1. Introduction to media ethics in the digital world**
- 2. Dignity**
- 3. Transparency**
- 4. Privacy Overview**
- 5. Privacy 2**
- 6. Freedom of Expression**
- 7. Cancel Culture and Freedom of Speech**
- 8. Twitter and Free Speech in 2020**
- 9. Facebook and Power**
- 10. Data**
- 11. Images**
- 12. Women and Children First**

Details:

1. Introduction: How did we get here? Reason we study this is we have come, as humankind, poorly prepared for the influx of information and interaction that is now common. We think how quickly what we will simply call “the internet” has spread Compared to, for example, how long it took radio to reach millions of homes. The digital world dissolved barriers, but brought a whole different social experience, for which we were not really equipped.

2. Dignity: this is at the heart of the human experience. We all possess dignity as part of being human, and should acknowledge this in others. Many online platforms have allowed dignity to be trashed. Is dignity washed up?

3. Transparency: being open and transparent in your message and means creates trust, which is essential for a successful online dimension to both professional and personal lives.

4 and 5: Privacy: We'll talk about this topic in two sessions, and it is important in several aspects of digital life. It has proved to be one of the key ethical challenges of life – and commerce, and politics – online. Since Mark Zuckerberg declared years ago that “privacy is dead”, a once-sacred part of our life has become “old-fashioned”. This week and next we look at our understanding of privacy, its importance and its neglect. Also we examine the First and Fourth Amendments to the Constitution, how they are relevant to protection of privacy, and the evolving oversight and regulation of our property, our privacy.

6. Freedom of Expression: the great liberation of the internet has led to hate speech, cruelty, vulgarity. Some communicators of these lurk in the Dark Net, but others are above the ground. Does anything go? Freedom of expression is protected by the Constitution, and is cherished by liberals and human rights activists. But should or can it be unlimited? We consider John Stuart Mill's thought on free speech, and where, or if, lines can be drawn.

7. Cancel Culture: after examining the historical background and attitudes to free speech, this week takes a contemporary take on “cancel culture” and no-platforming, where opinions considered by a group to be unacceptable are suppressed. The digital world has been key in the power of Cancel Culture – the experience of Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling in 2020 one good example.

8. Twitter and Free Speech in 2020: the year that “flagged tweets” became a regular occurrence, with even the President falling victim. We look at Twitter's evolution since its start in 2006, and what the latest developments mean and represent for digital ethics.

9. Facebook and Power: in the second of our two sessions on digital giants, we look at how a college friend network has become one of the biggest and most powerful companies in the world. Facebook is becoming more popular with the old than youth, but still has massive reach and is indispensable for impoverished groups and small businesses.

10. Data protection and data mining: what does it all mean? Cambridge Analytica and Facebook. Data leakage: why it matters, and how often, and badly it happens. Commercial and political actors seem to have been at fault. The Internet of Things and the widening reach of AI (artificial intelligence) gives so many more opportunities for this data to abound and be misused.

11. Image issues, with Public Relations and Commercial Considerations: a picture is worth a thousand words. However, even the camera lies these days – deep fakes, for example. The growing challenge of believing what you see, and what it is ethical (harm-free) to upload.

12. Women and children: the vulnerability of the under-age, and online abuse of women. This is often more than “unethical”, but we will study it as an example of how the digital world has gone rogue, and examine the problem for female politicians in particular. Bullying and its disastrous effects in the cyber-sphere.

13. Who runs the internet, anyway? Should it be controlled? How is this being done? the great liberation of the internet has led to hate speech, cruelty, vulgarity. Some communicators of these lurk in the Dark Net, but others are above the ground. Does anything go?

That is the course work, and the final weeks will be revision and time to perfect the final assignment.

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DIGITAL ETHICS FOR MEDIA: GRADING SCHEME

RTV 4930 SECTION 1204

INSTRUCTOR: *Angela Long*

Distance lecturer

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OFFICE HOURS: *As I live in Ireland, which is five hours ahead of Florida on the clock, my virtual office hours, in your time terms, are from 9am to 2pm Monday to Friday. In emergency, try Skype – leave a message if I am not online.*

GRADING POLICIES:

| Assignment | Points or percentage |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1: Essay | 15% |
| 2: Audio or video | 25% |
| 3: Final presentation | 50% |
| 4: Discussion participation | 10% |

GRADING SCALE:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| A = 95-100 | Excellent, near model assignment |
| A- = 90-94 | High standard in all criteria |
| B+ = 85-89 | Very good if not excellent |
| B = 75-84 | Good |
| B- = 70-74 | Above average |
| C+ = 65-69 | Average |
| C = 60-64 | Average |
| C- = 55-59 | Just acceptable |
| D = 50-55 | Poor |
| E = Below 50 | Fail |

(For more information, see: <http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>)